

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 14, 2013

Agenda Item: Management of Madison Buffalo Jump State Park

Division: Parks

Action Needed: Approval of Final Decision

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Madison Buffalo Jump State Park includes 638.4 acres of land, with 617.5 of those acres (designated as School Trust lands) owned by the Montana Dept. of Natural Resource Conservation (DNRC) and 20.9 acres owned by FWP. The Parks Division is responsible for a full scope of park operations and maintenance. An audit exception discovered that since executing the lease for the park in 1967, the Parks Division had not been asked to provide annual compensation to DNRC for use of the School Trust property (\$4,272 annual fee plus 2% annual increase).

Montana State Parks is challenged to sustain the parks system and faces a number of fiscal and fundamental concerns given the number of parks, the level of staffing, and operational budget compared to more sustainable state park systems around the West. Due to these constraints, Montana State Parks proposed relinquishing management of the Madison Buffalo Jump State Park to DNRC at the December Commission. The Commission instructed the Division to seek public comment and to report back the results of the public process.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The Parks Division conducted a 32-day comment period to solicit public input on this issue. The Division hosted two open houses and invited the public to learn about the challenges that Montana State Parks faces in managing Madison Buffalo Jump, as well provide an opportunity to discuss the health of park system as whole. A total of 230 comments were received on the topic, with the following breakdown: 213 comments supported keeping Madison Buffalo jump as a state park; 3 comments supported foregoing management to DNRC; and 14 comments neither opposed nor supported the action.

Alternatives and Analysis: The majority of the comments supported keeping the jump as a state park, and not turning management of the park back to DNRC. Comments expressed that due to the cultural significance of the site, its value as an educational resource, and multitude of recreational opportunities, Montana State Parks should retain management of the site in the parks system. The process also allowed Montana State Parks to engage the public on these complicated issues. Significant support was voiced and a number of citizens offered to get involved in improving management and stewardship of the park long-term.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: Based on the support received for Madison Buffalo Jump as a state park, the department recommends that FWP sign the license agreement with DNRC, pay the first annual fee of \$4,272 for use of the School Trust property, and seek a long-term solution to the stewardship of the park.

Proposed Motion: “I move the department sign the license agreement and pay the first \$4,272 annual fee to DNRC for Madison Buffalo Jump State Park and pursue improved stewardship of the park with citizen involvement and support.”

